LYNCHING AND MURDER

IN

CANTON, MISSISSIPPI

1938

1939
The state of Mississippi is roughly divisible into three main regions or areas. The western part of the state is bounded by the Mississippi River, which annually adds millions of dollars to the fertility of a soil already made fabously rich through the prodigality of this mighty and inexhaustible body of water. To this part of the state Mississippians have given the name, the Delta Country. Others have called it Mississippi’s Black Belt. Some say it is so named because of the richness and color of the soil and still others say it is because of the preponderance of black men who work the plantations of the Delta. The Delta is a distinct region culturally and otherwise. Here Cotton is still king and here is to be found large numbers of those black men who have ever been associated with the cultivation of cotton since the early foundations of American civilisation. Here the white man’s word is law and here his unspoken words have been translated into unwritten laws which are at once more powerful and more binding than many which have been written into the statute books. Here is influence and wealth, sometimes gaudy and sickening and sometimes quiet and gracious. But for those who till the soil and run the mills there is poverty, bleak, bear and at times full of ugliness, brutality and spiritual emptiness. Here black men live in subservience to the will of white men grown cruel with power and privilege. Here is a civilisation apart: big, turbulent, unpredictable like the river which crevles across her barrier to lose itself in the blue waters of the Gulf.

To the east of the Delta lies the Pinch roads quietly brooding over ridges and hill tops which some men have called mountains. Here lies Mississippi’s Great White Belt for here live her hill people full of scorn of black men and aristocracy and full of pride in the reign of the white man. Here the hills have burned with fiery crosses planted upon them by white robed Klansmen and here the valleys have echoed to the dying screams of a black man held in the hands of a howling mob of white men, women and children. The barren hills crested Verdaman and George and
Bilboe, unwearying antagonists of black men, eternal advocates of white supremacy.

Eastward lies the Prairie. Rich in her soil, rich in her traditions of the past but like her sister regions poor in the gentle ways of living and dying.

Wedge between the Delta and the Prairie lies the little town of Canton. Half in and half out of the regions it is a mixture of each. Here cotton has been king and here he has exercised dominion over the lives of black men and white men alike. Here great forests have been felled and here men have grown rich on the green gold of the hills and the white gold of the valleys and plains. When cotton saw evil days there was always lumber waiting to snatch the sinking from what would otherwise have been certain financial disaster.

Today Mississippi, through the leadership of former Governor White, looks to the future, out of a past grown gloomy by monotonous rows of cotton and corn. Today she looks with concern to the rehabilitation and revitalisation of her economy through the importation of industries into the state which are subsidised and paid for by her citizens.

In recent weeks oil has been discovered in the Hebo basin. With the discovery of oil the city of Jackson expects to double its present population which has doubled within the last two decades. Economically, Mississippi looks toward the future with confidence and pride. As it moves forward in broadening the scope of its economic life, will it move forward in extending decent opportunities for life and work to the thousands of black men and women from whom it has taken so much and given so little?

Your investigator spent five days in Canton, Jackson, and vicinity. Canton is the county seat of Madison county and it may be said to be a typical mid-southern community with the exception that its churches are unusually large and well kept. The white residential section is not untypical in that it has many large, not to say almost elegant, homes. The Negro section is well defined and has its quota of warm inviting homes, unpaved streets etc.
Your investigator met numerous extraordinarily able and fine citizens in Canton. Among them were several graduates of Mississippi colleges who possessed an unusual ability to speak with fluency and competency regarding many matters of national and local interest. Many of those with whom I talked were refined, gracious, hospitable, cultured. They were equipped from every angle to participate creatively in the ongoing of a state which at times has sought to dull their comprehension of social evils and frustrate their efforts to better their common weal. Some of them I found to possess talents which were going to waste because there was no room in which to employ them, talents which might do much to lift the black clouds of ignorance and backwardness hanging so densely over Mississippi's horizon.

On the whole, however, conditions existing among "Negroes in Canton is not greatly different, if any at all, from that which universally prevails throughout the deep-South. One expects to find a deep distrust and suspicion of the motives of nearly all white men, a faltering, though sublime hope, that somehow a new day will be born or won for themselves and their children. Over-shadowing all their faith and hope and trust is the menacing uncertainty of the present: an ever-present terror incomprehensible to most white men.

Despite the burdensome physical and spiritual hardships to which Deep-South Negroes are daily subjected little deep-set hatred for white people is in evidence. The seeds of hatred have been planted; they have not yet been fully watered. One is amazed to find men who live under such conditions possessing such breadth of social comprehension and understanding, tolerance and active good-will. At the time your investigator interviewed some of these citizens the possibility of a European war was imminent. He found a genuine hatred for Hitler and Hitlerism, a broad sympathy for England and France and a profound attachment and love for America. There was observable an intense devotion to democracy and an ardent hope that they might be permitted to participate in its realization and fulfillment.
It was in this sort of atmosphere that Joe Rodgers lived. He came to Canton from a rural community nearby Forest, Mississippi, in 1935 or '36. Early and easily he won for himself the respect and confidence of the Negro citizens of Canton. His thirty-five or sixty years in Mississippi had deepened his insights, mellowed his spirit and given him a sense of responsibility for the welfare of his fellow-citizens. He felt an obligation to assist in every good cause looking toward the alleviation of the suffering of his people.

At Canton he became a member of Mount Zion Baptist Church. Soon he was made a deacon in the church and elected president of the church choir.

Joe Rodgers undoubtedly possessed many unusual and noble qualities of character for he was universally respected and esteemed by all those who knew him. He was apparently impressive to look at, weighing in the neighborhood of 185 or 190 pounds and strong of body and limb. He was active in community affairs and ever anxious to turn a hand for a friend whenever possible.

As far as anyone knew, Rodgers had never experienced any trouble of any sort in Canton with either the white or colored people and had never been approached by officers of the law for any cause whatsoever.

Joe Rodgers was unmarried and lived at the home of a friend in Canton where he had a private room and upon which he looked as his home. Here he was thoroughly satisfied and contented. He was generally known to be quiet, industrious and a hard worker.

On Saturday May 6th, Rodgers was helping to install a turbine at the Dinkman mill when he was employed. After the day's work had been completed he went for his pay. Upon receiving his envelope he noted that some money had been deducted for reasons which he did not understand. He inquired of the foreman the reason for the deduction from his pay and was told that the money had been deducted for rent on a house which he was supposed to occupy while working for the company.

He told the foreman that he had no reason to live at the mill since he was comfortably situated elsewhere. It is generally understood that Rodgers said
no more about the matter and went home. (Your investigator was unable to
certain whether this was a long standing policy of the company or recently
introduced or whether it was a general policy at all and/or whether it was a
use on the part of the foreman to secure funds from the workers. The amount
was thought to be around $4.50.)

On Sunday Rodgers attended church in Canton and in conversation with some
friends mentioned the events of the preceding day to them. On Monday morning
Rodgers in company with one "Sun" being returned to their work at the mill.

Sometime during the early part of the morning Rodgers approached the foreman
in charge of the work and expressed dissatisfaction over his week's pay. The
foreman evidently resented Rodgers's reference to the matter and struck him
with his fist. Words undoubtedly passed between them and the foreman grabbed
a spade with which to strike Rodgers. Rodgers, it is related, wrested the spade
from the foreman and struck him with it. At this juncture "Sun" being appeared
on the scene and succeeded in separating the two men.

Whether Rogers continued at his job or started to return home is not known
but he was not seen by anyone outside of the mill grounds after he went to work.

By noon of the same day the knowledge of his trouble at the mill and his subsequent
disappearance, supposedly at the hands of a mob, was widespread.

In Thursday morning Constable Bruce of the local police force was noticed
walking near the banks of Pearl River. Sometime during the morning he discovered
the mute form of Joe Rodgers in the sluggish waters of the river. When the body
had been recovered from its watery grave it was laid upon the banks where it was
viewed by many citizens.

The naked body of Joe Rodgers bore mute testimony to the manner in which he
had been disposed of. Although still in death his lifeless form was a ghastly
and revealing witness to the fact that he had come to his death at the hands of
a mob. With a half-inch rope his feet had been securely bound and his hands
tied tightly behind him. According to numerous persons who viewed the body immediately after it had been recovered from the river and while it reposed at the funeral home, Rodgers' body had been beaten to a pulp. The marks on the body seemed to indicate that Rodgers was beaten from head to feet with wooden clubs and sticks. The head was smashed from a heavy blow and the body so bruised and misshapen as to arouse doubt as to whether it was Rodgers or some other victim of a mob's fury. One of Rodgers' friends was present and caused the mouth to be examined for an upper plate of false teeth. The plate when extracted from the mouth tallied in detail with the description given by Rodgers' friend. According to reliable testimony, the body bore no signs of having been cut or burned with hot irons. It appears that Joe Rodgers was simply beaten to death by blunt instruments which were used to smash his naked body.

The following letters from Mayor Charles Harris of Canton and Deputy Sheriff Samie Parker in behalf of the Sheriff's office indicate the official attitude in regard to the manner in which Rodgers came to his death. The third letter below from the Rev. J. H. Foster indicates the opinion generally held by the white citizens of Canton.

"Mrs. L. Alford
McComb, Miss.

"Dear Mr. Alford:

"Re: reply to your letter of the 16th, will say that there has been considerable misinformation promulgated by certain agencies in the North regarding an occurrence in this vicinity on or about May 8th.

"A negro named Joe Rodgers became engaged in an altercation with the foreman of a construction gang which wound up by the white foreman being struck on the head by Rodgers, who knocked the foreman unconscious with a spade. Some outfit known as the association for the advancement of the Colored Race, claims the row started because the gun mill was trying to make the negro pay rent on a company-owned house he had not occupied. He was in reality not working for the gun mill but for a man who had a contract to install a turbine at the plant.

"The negro was found three days later in Pearl River. The Sheriff held an investigation, empaneled a jury, and the verdict was that the deceased came to his death at the hands of parties unknown."
"The grand jury convenes here next week, whether or not any further investigation will be made remains to be seen.

Yours very truly,

C.H. Harris (Mayor of Canton)

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"Mrs. L.W. Alford, Chairman
McComb, Miss.

Dear Mrs. Alford:

Your letter was received this morning in regard to death of Jim Rodgers. How, why and when this negro came to his death I do not know.

This negro was found in the river with his hands and feet tied. The shins of this negro's legs and his arms appeared to be bloodshot and looked as if they might have had several licks, but he was not shot, or burned and his body did not show any signs of any other punishment inflicted on his person.

"Is to any statement you saw in the papers about me not having made any investigation, then you can treat that as utterly false. The statement in the paper also referred to him being lynched because he did not pay his house rent, and that is also false.

"It was reported that this negro knocked a white man in the head with a shovel over some fuss with him and a contractor, after which he ran away.

I examined a good many witnesses, both black and white, and could not find anyone that had seen or heard of him since he left his work.

"I do not think you would call this a lynching, but would rather say he was murdered.

"If there is any other information you desire, please call on me.

Yours very truly

C.H. James Sheriff

by Cammie Parker, Deputy"

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"Dear Mrs. Alford:

I have made inquiries into the death of the Negro Rogers and the evidence shows that it was murder and not lynching. The body was found in Pearla river with the hands tied behind and the legs tied together. Evidently someone tied him up and threw him into the river to drown. There were no bruises found on the body.
"I understand there was some difficulty between the Negro and one of the
foremen at the mill a few days before the body was found in the river.

"I think you can safely say that it was not a case of lynching, but
purely murder. Circuit Court is in session here now and the Grand Jury
may reveal something about this case.

..............................

Sincerely yours

Charlesley, Pastor"

The evidence in the case points conclusively and unmistakably
to the conclusion that Joe Rodgers was lynched by a mob composed of a
considerable number of men. The above letters support this view.

It is unreasonable to believe that "a powerfully muscled man" as one
witness described Rodgers, who weighed around 190 pounds could be
securely tied in hand and feet with a half-inch grass rope, beaten to
a pulp, dragged to the river's edge and his body disposed of by a single
man or by only two or three men. Such could have happened had Rodgers
been knocked unconscious by a blow or in some manner made powerless.

If such had been the case there would have been no necessity to go to the
trouble to bind the body in the manner heretofore described.

The mill at which Rodgers was employed is located partly within the
limits of the city of Canton. It is so situated as to make it extremely
unlikely that a group of men from outside of the mill could enter the
grounds without being seen by the colored residents. No unusual
excitement or disturbance was known to have been noted by the "Nego
residents in the mill area. The facts would seem to warrant the conclusion
that Joe Rodgers was lynched by a mob composed of workers at the Dinkman
mills.

The opinion was advanced by several persons that the Negro employees
may have been forced to accompany the mob and to witness the lynching of
Rodgers. This was done in order to "teach the niggers respect for white
men" and to have a scapegoat should any word of Rodgers' death leak to the general public.

Your investigator is inclined to believe that unusual factors operate in this case since persons who are known to possess valuable information refuse to divulge any facts in connection with the case or in any way talk about it. Your investigator worked through well-known Negro citizens of the immediate vicinity of Canton but they were unable to secure some persons known to have considerable knowledge of the affair.

Negroes of Canton are no more or no less sensitive to such brutal treatment as that meted out to Joe Rodgers than are Negroes generally. They are human beings who are intimidated, coerced, bruised and brutalized by the very nature of the society of which they are a part and in which they must live and work. Life is often painful and always sustained by the slenderest circumstances. A man's work or station in life is no guarantee against mob attack or less overt expressions of the white man's will to dominate and rule the countryside. If a Negro violates the long established codes of the white man he must pay and all too often his life is the only thing acceptable to those who rule.

The white people of Canton are just ordinary folk with a fair respect for the decencies of civilized society. To many citizens of Canton the lynching of any man is a repugnant and repulsive thing. There are people in Canton who are incensed over the Rodgers case. They too are intimidated and held in check by long established mores and customs.

In almost every community there is a small group of self-elected men who quietly but always thoroughly guide the affairs and thinking of the people. In small southern towns the country newspaper has considerable opinion-molding influence. In Canton, Mayor Charles N. Harris is owner
and editor of The Madison County Herald. The fact that not a single word concerning such brutal affairs as the lynching of Joe Rodgers ever reaches the pages of his paper is telling testimony to the mayor's attitude toward Negroes and of his determination to prevent any knowledge of such incidents to get abroad so as to reflect upon the civilising influences at work amongst his fellow townsman.

Following the discovery of Rodgers' nude form the body was taken to the People's Funeral Home at Canton. Shortly thereafter Joe Rodgers was returned to his former home near Forest, Mississippi, to rest amongst the pine-scented hills where as a child he chased yellow butterflies and gathered in the fruits of a rich countryside. To Joe Rodgers, strong of body and spirit, came cruel and agonising death. To thousands of Negroes in the deep South the death of Joe Rodgers is but an awful omen of that which stands between them and the fulfillment of the dreams of every child who bears his face to reason and fairplay. To thousands of others, both black and white, it is the symbol of death in a land which has hardly begun to live.

Your investigator believes the following points to be self-evident from the evidence just cited.

(1). That Joe Rodgers did not come to his death at the hands of persons unknown but to the contrary he came to his death at the hands of a mob composed of employees of the Dinkman mills.

(2). That the above is known to be the facts by the officials of Madison County.

(3). That no real effort has been made or will be made to bring the guilty parties to justice.
On the afternoon of July 21, 1938, a mill worker by the name of J.B. McAdams of Brandon, Mississippi, came to Canton, Mississippi, to visit his daughter who lay ill in a local hospital. Before leaving Brandon Mr. McAdams had borrowed approximately $50.00 from his employer with which to meet certain of his daughter's hospital expenses. Mr. McAdams visited his daughter during the afternoon and later talked with various acquaintances in Canton. During the early part of the evening Mr. McAdams was discovered by a group of citizens as he lay on the sidewalks suffering apparently from some minor injuries inflicted upon his person. Mr. McAdams related that he had been but recently attacked by an unknown Negro man who had robbed him of his money. Mr. McAdams was then taken to a local hospital where he was treated for his wounds.

Officers and local citizens soon gathered at the scene of the alleged crime and decided to throw a "blockade" or cordon around that part of the city in which the crime was supposed to have occurred.

On the same evening several young people were having a party at the home of a friend. Among those present were two young Negro boys Claude Banks and Willie Jones. Banks was the youngest son of an honored and respected citizen of Canton who was the proprietor of the People's Funeral Home. Young Banks was but 22 years of age and had but recently graduated from high school. His companion, Willie Jones, a most pleasant and agreeable young man, was about the same age.

The young men decided to leave the party before the others had departed. Neither of the young men had any knowledge that any trouble had occurred in the city and were wholly unaware that a body of white men were engaged in a manhunt on the streets of Canton. In returning home it was necessary for the young men to go through that section of the city occupied by the
white men who were on the lookout for the alleged assassin of McHerns. As Banks and Jones approached the guarded area they noted the presence of an unusual number of people on the street, but since the group at this particular point was not particularly large and since there were no obstructions in the street to thwart the passage of automobiles they assumed the crowd to be a body of citizens gathering after some meeting or a group of youngsters playing on the streets in the late summer evening. They heard voices, saw flashlights but recognised no serious effort being made to stop or delay them. As they neared the scene of the collected men they slowed down their car and moved slowly through the crowd. Just as the car passed beyond the so-called "blockade" several members of the posse or mob began to shoot at the moving automobile with shot-guns and pistols. Young Claude Banks was at the wheel. As he drove away a bullet smashed through the west side of the car and entered the back part of his head. His companion did not know that he had been struck by a bullet until young Banks began to slump in his seat and the automobile to careen across the pavement. A few moments later it overturned on the curb.

The posse followed the automobile bearing the two men and when young Jones came to himself he found guns and flashlights being shoved to his face. Jones was jerked from the car by members of the posse which by this time had been greatly augmented by other citizens attracted to the scene by the shouting and shooting. No one was permitted to touch young Banks who lay at the bottom of the car or to examine him to discover the extent of his injuries. Young Jones, still unaware of the cause of the excitement, was immediately placed under arrest, thrown into a waiting automobile, driven incidentally by a white woman, and hurried off to jail.

Present at the scene were four members of the Canton police force, a deputy sheriff and many prominent business men. A deputy sheriff and two local police-
men accompanied Jones to the jail. During the drive to the jail the officers repeatedly sought to force young Jones to say that he and young Banks had been drinking. This Jones refused to do and likewise denied any connection or knowledge with the alleged robbery of McAdams. Evidently the temper of the mob had by now been raised to a high pitch. One of the men in the car hearing Jones was heard to say, "Well, we’ve done killed one, we might as well kill another one." One of the men in the car claimed with considerable satisfaction that he had fired the shot which killed young Banks but my informant was unable to say who this person was.

My informant stated that young Jones was literally thrown into the automobile and from it into the jail and that he was roughly handled throughout the time that he was in the custody of the officers. He was placed in a cell in the local police station. While there he was continuously subjected to threats and questioning. He was told, according to my informant, not to say that "you ain’t been drinking". After being held in the jail for nearly two hours young Jones was released. Upon leaving the jail he was told that he would "catch sudden pneumonia" (be lynched) if he did not keep quiet about the whole affair.

Meanwhile a friend telephoned Claude Banks’ father and revealed to him the terrible events of the evening. Mr. Banks sent his oldest son, who had but recently graduated from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, to secure the body.

Shortly after Mr. McAdams related his story of the attack to officers in Canton preparations were made for a real man hunt. Bloodhounds were readily secured with which to track down the person who it was alleged had attacked McAdams. The bloodhounds led the posse to the home of Rev. Jackson in Canton. At Rev. Jackson’s home the posse discovered a man by the name of Pate. In Pate’s room the officers stated that they found garments covered with
dust and blood. Pete was arrested and taken to jail.

By this time the entire country side had been aroused and word of the man hunt had reached the state capitol. A photographer for the Jackson Daily Clarion-Ledger sought to take a picture of the body of Claude Banks but he was prevented from doing so on the personal orders of Mayor Charles M. Harris of Canton. The Daily Clarion-Ledger states, (July 22, 1938)

"A Clarion-Ledger photographer, attempting to photograph the body of Claude Banks, was stopped by police under orders of "Mayor Charles Harris of Canton. Despite his protests that he wanted no photographs of the posse, but only of the "negro's body, the newspaperman was ordered away with his camera and an officer assigned to see that the order was obeyed."

As far as your investigator was able to discover there were no protests on the part of white citizens over the murder of Claude Banks. There were, however, certain citizens who privately expressed their indignation and sent expressions of sympathy and regrets to Mr. "Banks and his family. Soon after the murder of his son Mr. Banks called upon the Mayor, Mr. Charles M. Harris, in an effort to get the city of Canton to make some compensation for the death of his son. The Mayor, in consultation with other city officials, declined to give any assistance to the family and refused responsibility for the crime on the basis that the men who killed young Banks had not been deputised, did not constitute a posse and hence the city was not responsible. The city furthermore refused to assist in any way to repair the damage done to the automobile in which the two young men were riding at the time. Following Mr. "Banks interview with Mayor "Harris he called upon Judge Julian Alexander of Jackson who advised Mr. "Banks that there was little if anything that could be done in the matter and that the better policy would be to let the matter rest.

From conversations with numerous people your investigator found the following account of the incident which resulted in the death of Claude Banks to be fairly generally held among the citizens of Canton.
Mr. McAdams, who was employed at a saw mill in or near Brandon, Mississippi, borrowed approximately Fifty Dollars from his employer with which to meet certain hospital expenses of his daughter. Although it is understood that Mr. McAdams had visited the hospital, seen his daughter, he had not paid the hospital bill. Mr. McAdams alleges that he was attacked in the white residential section of the city whereas it is reliably reported that he was first noticed in the Negro section of town. Various persons who later recognised him reported that McAdams seemed to be under the influence of liquor during the latter part of the afternoon.

McAdams was not seriously wounded. His clothes were disarranged and his body bore a few minor abrasions and scratches. There was little to indicate that he had been attacked by a person intent upon robbery. When the incident was reported in Brandon where McAdams lived it was genuinely doubted. It was
believed there and also in Canton that McKee had lost his money in a gambling house or had been "frisked" out of it at a dive and that he invented the story of the attack upon him by a Negro man in order to cover up the loss of the money, which he had borrowed to pay his daughter's bill at the local hospital. It is reliably reported that McKee was shortly thereafter discharged by his employer in Brandon.

On the evening of July 21st. officers had been led to the home of Rev. Jackson where they arrested a Negro man by the name of Pate. Officers stated at that time that bloody soaked clothes were found in his possession. Pate was lodged in jail and charged with the robbery of McKee. Within a few weeks Pate, who had been charged with the crime, was released from the local jail. It would appear that had there been the slightest reason to accept McKee's version of the story that Pate would have been duly tried and sent to prison or the electric chair. That the story was pure invention is attested to by the fact that Pate continues to reside in Canton and has not been molested by anyone since the affair of the 21st. of July.
Young Banks and Willie Jones left the party between eight-thirty and nine o'clock, or shortly after twilight. By the time they reached the area occupied by the posse it was just dark. The incident occurred one month after the longest day in the year. It is reasonable to assume that McAdams was not discovered by officers before eight-thirty and in all probability not before eight o'clock. The alleged attack upon his person therefore must have occurred during the early part of the evening, between seven and eight o'clock. At this time of evening it is still quite light. It is unreasonable to believe that a negro would attack an unknown white man in the residential section of a small southern town at an hour when most people are seated on their front porches and all windows and doors flung wide open and when his actions could be easily discernible at a considerable distance.
The evidence seems to indicate that the group of men who fired upon Banks and Jones was a legally deputised posse. It is understood that numerous telephone conversations occurred during the early part of the evening between the jail and local residents. It is furthermore understood that Sheriff James was in Canton at the time. It is positively known that both deputies and members of the local police force were among those who shot Claude Banks.

Whether a posse or a plain mob now matters little to Claude Banks or his parents and brother. A young life, full of glow and promise, has been snuffed out. The posse in Canton acted as similar groups always act. A white man had been attacked by a Negro; a negro must pay, the right "nigro if possible, but a Negro at whatever costs. Two careless, happy Negro boys rode by, then it was discovered that they were Negroes and did not stop, they became immediately guilty in the eyes of the white men who formed the posse. No effort was made to stop them by a blockade of the street or by shooting out the tires of their automobile. They were "just two niggers" and as such could be shot down like wild animals seeking to escape before the hunter.

Thus death came to another citizen of Canton, Mississippi.
With regard to the whole problem of lynching your investigator desires to make the following statement. It is his considered judgment that, for various reasons, lynching is entering a new and altogether dangerous phase. Lynchings in the past have been characterized by the mob, the faggot, the rope. Hundreds of people, often thousands, poured out to participate or witness the lynching of a man or woman accused of some crime, often of the most trivial nature and often without any real charge at all. Pictures of the mobbed and mobbers have been taken and widely circulated. Souvenirs of the lynched man or woman, in the form of fingers, toes and other parts of the body, have been brazenly displayed by members of the mob.

Public opinion is beginning to turn toward this sort of mob activity. Sentiment is growing against lynching. Agitation for Federal and state anti-lynching laws gives pause to the lynching crowd. Lynching, they say, must go
on but it must be done quietly so as not to attract attention, draw publicity.
Thus those who must rule by terror and intimidation turn to new methods.
The old mob is disappearing but the work of the mob goes on. A Negro is
accused of some crime, real or alleged. A few white men gather, formulate
their plans, seize their victim. In some lonely swamp a small body of men
do the job formerly done by a vast, howling bloodthirsty mob composed of
men, women, and children. The word is then passed that the matter has been
handled to the satisfaction of those in charge of such matters.

Your investigator has investigated numerous lynchings. His acquaintance
with lynchers and the lynched extends over a lifetime. It is his judgment that
countless Negroes are lynched yearly but their disappearance is shrouded in
mystery for they are dispatched quietly and without general knowledge. The
lynching of Joe Rodgers is a case in point.

It is his judgment that a careful study covering four or five states of the
Deep South for a period of months would reveal a startling number of lynchings
otherwise unaccounted for. He believes that a revelation of this character
would greatly influence public opinion and go a long way in rectifying the present situation.

Your investigator was informed by competent observers that since the notorious double torch lynching which occurred at Duck Hill, Mississippi, more than a year ago that word has been passed that in the future all difficulties between Negroes and whites will be handled by a small group of white men already appointed for that purpose. He was similarly advised that in the vicinity of Cleveland, Mississippi, at least four Negroes had been lynched within the past four or five months.

It is his judgment finally that every effort should be made to secure the active cooperation and assistance of the Department of Justice in an effort to bring to light such activities as heretofore described.

Respectfully submitted,

Howard Kester

Oct. 10, 1939